

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Testimony of Mike Atwood

TESTIMONY -- GALLATIN LAND CONSOLIDATION ACT
MIKE ATWOOD -- DIRECTOR OF LANDS -- RY TIMBER, INC.
LIVINGSTON, MT.
US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Mike Atwood, I am a forester and Director of Lands for RY Timber, Inc. with operations in Livingston and Townsend Montana. The passage of this legislation as submitted is very important to our company for future timber supply.

All the forest products companies (small and large business) in our geographical area have supported this trade especially the timber for land component. If you would pass this legislation as written, it would mean a great deal to the timber companies and all of the Montanan's who come from a wide range of interests to support this act. I attended a dozen public meetings on this legislation held across the state and I will tell you, virtually everyone supports the general concept of this trade, there are those who support it as long as their backyard is not in the deal, and there are those who didn't get anything they wanted, but many concessions were made by Big Sky Lumber to find some middle ground.

I want to compliment the Montana Delegation's staff for working so hard in a bi-partisan effort to insure that ALL interests have had a seat at the table in crafting this bill. I especially want to thank Congressman Rick Hill for holding the line for a federal timber component to equalize values. Without it we may not have a timber sale program on the Gallatin for the next two years. We support the revised sufficiency language for the timber sales provided the Taylor Fork Lands are allowed to be held in escrow by the owners until the timber is delivered.

The environmentalists have stated they can support 20 million board feet of sales to equalize values and we need to hold them to it. Since I have this opportunity to address this committee on forests and forests' health, I can tell you that twenty million board feet of timber represents only 5% of the commercial timber resource that DIES EVERY YEAR in the Gallatin Forest - so we're not talking about much timber. Balancing values in a large land exchange is no easy task, as you know, there has to be a little something for everyone and the truth is, the public has to come out a little bit better than the private company to get the level of support this land exchange enjoys. I know from first hand experience when our company worked with you to pass the Lost Creek Land Exchange Act (contained in the Presido Bill) last session, Lost Creek had similar 'Win-win' examples for wildlife habitat, timber jobs, and a wide range of public lands benefits.

This bill as submitted has two unique opportunities:

1. We have a consensus among our Montana Delegation and that's very significant.

2. It forces the environmentalists, loggers, and the forest service to work together and design a small amount of timber sales that are acceptable to all parties. If we don't accomplish this we lose the timber and the public loses the Taylor Fork Lands.

This is a very good bill for Montana and I hope you can move it through congress swiftly in it's present form. The private owners have been very patient with the process and we need to finish this third and final phase of this important consolidation effort in Montana.

Thank You for this opportunity to testify.

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